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UNCLAS HARARE 000015

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S AND AF/EX
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER
USDOC FOR 2037 DIEMOND
PASS USTR ROSA WHITAKER
TREASURY FOR ED BARBER AND C WILKINSON
USAID FOR MARJORIE COPSON

[1](#)E. O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [AMGT](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: Still Too Few Rains for Non-Irrigated Crops

[1](#)1. Summary: The latest Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) report confirms that Zimbabwe is still drawing too little rainfall to improve food supply. Continued drought affords the GOZ an opportunity to dodge blame for the disastrous consequences of its fast-track land reform and export policies, the primary causes of dwindling agricultural output. End Summary.

[1](#)2. The FEWSNET report characterizes rainfall during the 2002/03 as "poor," ranging from 40 to 60 percent of normal. Most other reports from around Zimbabwe's agricultural centers, both scientific and anecdotal, are similarly pessimistic. Half of this season's maize seed may not yield crop. A possibility still exists that heavy and persistent rains could rescue much of the crop, but it is becoming less likely. Even under the best of climate conditions, Zimbabwe is only cultivating for food only 50 percent (and for foreign exchange-earning cash crops, only 25 percent) of the area it used in the 1990s.

Comment

[1](#)3. Damage caused by the GOZ's fast-track land reform and export policies far exceeds the repercussions of El Nino. However, we expect the GOZ to continue to blame rainfall for low agricultural output. Postponing an eventual reckoning with its counterproductive policies does not bode well for an economy already declining by over 10 percent annually. By the time the GOZ devalues its currency, reduces crippling export taxes, stops intervening in the sale of primary goods and allows more able and equipped farmers take control of the resettled lands (perhaps by allowing title deeds to change hands), there may not be much of an economy left to salvage.

Sullivan